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# WHAT IS POLICENESS? ON BEING POLICE IN SOMALIA

**Abstract:** This article uses the notion of policeness to explore the essence of what police are, what makes for a police, and what makes it recognised as such. Western ideas of police are based on a specific understanding of what a police organisation is, but this is not necessarily the case in the global South. Based on the experience of Somalia's police forces, it appears that while there is something universally distinctive about police organisations, police are best understood as a project reflecting political and social processes within unequal fields of power. Ultimately, policeness, which alludes to the symbolic and coercive functions associated with police, is a matter of perception.

**Key words:** coercion, police culture, policeness, security, Somalia

At first glance, many Somali policemen lack the appearance and behavioural traits that Western criminological thought associates with police. Westerners entering the main hall of the central police station in Hargeisa, capital of the self-proclaimed independent state of Somaliland in north-west Somalia, often find it difficult to distinguish between officers and complainants, for both wear vests, t-shirts or miscellaneous military items. Identification is easier at a small nearby police station (Hargeisa has seven) where officers wear khaki uniforms, but the social acceptability of chewing the mild narcotic qat means that by the early afternoon the commander is asleep on a mattress under his desk while his officers sprawl on the floor by the counter. It is only in the police headquarters that officers wearing conventional blue or khaki shirts sit in offices, and even then some senior officers consider uniforms and ranks to be unnecessary.[1]

Uniforms and an alert appearance are not, of course, indicators of what it is to be police, yet Somali experience offers an opportunity to explore the elusive meaning of policeness — of what it means to be police, of what makes an organisation a police organisation, and what makes it recognised as such — in an environment stripped of the institutional and cultural resources on which international

policing models and police studies are predicated. It offers an extreme, but apposite, example that problematizes and illuminates some of the ways in which international organisations, in particular, think about police and act in relation to police in the global South. It suggests that the essence of what police are, and do, in areas of limited statehood, is to be found in the knowledge and skills needed to fulfil societal expectations regarding the management of low-level forms of disorder, rather than in a specific model or ideal. It tests the belief that police forces are inherently hierarchical organisations empowered by states to enforce their laws and manage their preferred form of order, and it raises questions about the relationship between security delivered by the state and security delivered through social processes. In other words, Somali experience brings out the fundamentals of policing in ways that are not otherwise obvious (Lenz, Beek and Göpfert 2013). It helps to re-contextualise international notions of police and policing.

In this article, I propose that policeness is a quality that has as much to do with the symbolic and coercive functions associated with the idea of a police as with particular forms of state-based organisation, capacity or activity. I build on Lund's understanding of stateness as an amalgamation of public authority by local institutions 'conjugated with the *idea* of the state' (italics in original, Lund 2006: 685. Compare Leftwich 2010; Risse 2012) to argue that in areas of limited or fragmented statehood such as Somalia, the idea of policeness, of being police, is as influential as the institutional ideals promoted by the international community. Further, the key factor influencing policeness in such environments is security levels. While policeness is reproduced discursively by sets of social actors, legacy issues and the ever-present threat of political or physical violence ensure that it is not merely a category created by language games. In fact, political imperatives and cultural continuities ensure that indigenous notions of police and policeness incorporate not only statist notions aligned to Western models, but also locally negotiated forms of authority, both of which are influenced primarily by security levels and social practices; to paraphrase Holdaway's observation on police culture, policeness 'acts as a lens' through which law, policy and practice are refracted (Holdaway 2013: 710).

Conducting the research needed to address these issues in Somalia is challenging; the ethnographic work advocated by, for example, Cockcroft is for now impossible (Cockcroft 2007; Holdaway 2013),

as is the implementation of scientifically rigorous evaluation studies or in-country experiments designed to assess the ways in which being police is articulated, understood and perceived historically. Nevertheless, a consistent picture of Somali police emerges from four-week's fieldwork conducted on behalf of the UNDP's Rule of Law Programme in Somalia (ROLS) in Somaliland, Puntland and Nairobi in September 2011,[2] which permits exploration of the nature of policeness. Based on personal observations and semi-structured interviews with approximately 30 Somali officers, supplemented by interviews with officials, elders, district safety committees, oversight committees and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from across Somalia's entities, and cross-checked against interviews with international police advisers and officials in Nairobi and the UK in 2012 and 2013, I propose that Somalia's experience offers a fresh perspective on policing and policeness. It challenges significant aspects of Western police studies while confirming others, thus prompting reflection on the applicability of Western criminological research to non-Western environments.

Developing in four parts, the discussion that follows considers first the notion of policeness. To explore the explanatory value of policeness, it addresses, second, the nature and composition of Somali-style police and policing before, third, paying special attention to the significance for policeness of security levels. This is examined in the light of Mogadishu's experience. It concludes that policeness is best understood as a label that is applied to both specific organisations and the set of social relations that the label's use produces and manages.

## ARGUMENT AND CASE STUDY

Police studies and international assistance projects are predicated on the assumption that officers from different countries share functional concerns, organisational preferences, occupational commonalities and traits, which reflect the danger and authority associated with policework. However, while the concept of police culture receive critical attention (O'Neill, Marks and Singh 2007; Loftus 2010), as does the notion of a police working personality, few studies offer a rounded view of the essential quality which sets police apart from other providers of security and justice, and even fewer consider what makes individuals recognisable as police in areas of limited statehood.[3] Despite the attention

now paid to synthesising influential research from the sociology of policing and developing an internationally relevant theory of policing (Loader 2011), most police-related research focuses on what police in rich liberal democracies do, or, if it looks to the South, on the best way for IGOs and bi-lateral donors to transfer democratic procedures to indigenous police (e.g. Bayley 2006; Downie 2013). Studies concentrate on how police can be reformed or managed, rather than on the traits or elements that comprise being police across a range of socio-political environments, and there are only a handful of studies addressing the political economy of policing in the South (e.g. Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013). This is not to suggest that Western views of police and policing are one-dimensional; there is, after all, a long tradition of commentators, from Bittner to Brodeur, emphasising the police's symbolic functions, and the need to think about policing in terms of organisation and capacity. Nevertheless, our knowledge of Southern police and policework is partial in both senses of the word.

The notion of policeness can help us to assess the analytical and empirical implications of this. Admittedly, policeness is not a commonly understood term. Also, it is a broad descriptive notion, which lacks precision and an underlying ontological reality. But it has value as an explanatory tool, especially when applied to police in complex and dynamic environments, such as Somalia's, about whom little is known. Additionally, it helps to make sense of situations in which the analytical and empirical boundaries between police and informal policing providers such as militia and self-defence units are ambiguous. In such cases, it is more helpful than, say, culture or function, and can help to redress their limitations.

The outline of an emergent international orthodoxy on what it means to be police is evident in the globalised concepts, notions, ideals and procedures promoted by IGOs such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN). However, all such organisations assess policing in terms of liberal standards and values. From this perspective, policeness, which can be said to involve a mix of functional tasks, desirable characteristics and normative standards, tends to be seen as reflecting or expressing the activities of police as a specific type of organisation. Thus the OECD-DAC's authoritative *Handbook on SSR* states that the police's

role in dealing with internal security is distinct from that of military, para-military, militia or gendarmerie-like constabulary forces (though it acknowledges that the boundaries between such groups are sometimes ambiguous) (OECD-DAC 2007: 165). Further, the *Handbook* argues that difference is reinforced by the police's need to be organized in special ways and to have equipment relating to 'the means of transport and communication/exchange of information, much of which relates to the key distinguishing technical skill or responsibility of criminal investigation'. Hence police are organized in departments such as general duties, traffic and criminal investigation, rather than infantry, ordnance or intelligence, and are judged against their possession of 'the necessary techniques and tools to base criminal investigations on factual and not solely testimonial proof, in particular forensic laboratories ... an accurate system for establishing and managing files of complaints, reports and testimonies ... a central database on crimes and offenders' (OECD-DAC 2007: 165). Consequently, the technical skills marking the police's distinctive character — their policeness —focus on 'knowledge of crime patterns', though the OECD links this to knowledge of 'the needs of the public', rather to the technical or political implications of such patterns. Indeed, 'developing a capacity to analyse information and develop preventive policing strategies is in all cases fundamental to moving towards a system of intelligence-led policing,' which is seen as the goal of modern professional policing (OECD-DAC 2007: 173). Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on police working within their societies while accepting responsibility for increasing 'trust between the police and the public' and developing 'partnerships to detect and prevent crime and increase community safety' (OECD-DAC 2007: 163). This is reinforced by statements to the effect that police will have 'a written mission/vision/values statement and code of conduct' that is 'in accordance with the philosophy of community-based policing and human rights standards' (OECD-DAC 2007: 172). And such objectives are seen as appropriate regardless of the nature of — and literacy levels in — the society concerned.

In practice, organisations such as the OECD wish to use police as a means to effect social or political change, and the literature and projects associated with such goals focus on the social purpose of the police; on what they should do, rather than on the nature of policeness. This can and does produce

significant insights, especially when combined with research on Southern police (Marenin 1994 on the police's role in reproducing order is a case in point), but it only takes us so far in understanding what it means to be police. Even so, insights can be extrapolated from the ways in which three terms commonly associated with police are used: coercion, professionalism and discipline.

## Coercion, professionalism and discipline

Coercion is the key variable in this context because most, if not all, police use actual or threatened physical force or intimidation, either to make up for inadequate skills or resources (e.g. Open Society Justice Initiatives 2010), or because officers are considered to possess a monopoly on the legitimate use of socially-sanctioned coercion in everyday life (e.g. BBC News 2014). Police are part of state or regime-based systems of social control, and their defining feature is thought to arise from their role as a 'mechanism for the distribution of non-negotiable coercive force' (Bittner 1970: 131; Bittner 1985). The potential for officers to abuse their power is accordingly high and some form of control filter or restraint is needed. Hence the insistence by oversight bodies, governments and IGOs that professionalism is essential, as in the application of accountability procedures intended to limit or manage officers' decisions and actions.

Current definitions of professionalism are less stringent than those used during the 1950s when the emphasis was on activities founded on a body of systematic theory that involves complicated operations requiring a lengthy training and specialist expertise, sanctioned by the host community and regulated by a code of ethics (e.g. Huntington 1957).[4] Today, professionalism is increasingly about status, service and accountability to civilian oversight bodies, as in 'professionalism in the delivery of policing services to all local communities' (PSNI 2011). The international community uses the term to allude to recognition by officers of the limits of their functional competence, the temptations offered by their coercive powers, and their subordination to the civilian, political and, in some cases, social and religious leaders who make decisions affecting the delivery of security and justice. But elsewhere in the world professionalism refers to international and/or political recognition, rather than qualifications, training or behaviour, as when Zimbabwe's police commissioner claimed that the professionalism of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) — 'which is in harmony with international

policing standards' — had led to the ZRP being regularly invited to provide UN peacekeeping duties: the ZRP 'remains a shining beacon of proficient policing in the region and internationally' (*Herald* 2005). From an international perspective, police professionalism alludes to officers accepting socially agreed restraints on the application of coercion, but from a Zimbabwean perspective it concerns the effective delivery of specific political aims and objectives.

In most, if not all, scholarly and policy-relevant studies, policework and policeness are thought to require a hierarchical, disciplined and uniformed organisation; constables may exercise considerable discretion and detectives may work in civilian clothes, but ranks and uniforms are usually understood as representing the discipline required to control the temptations policework brings. In fact, discipline is a key concept underpinning Western conceptions of policeness because it prompts a range of issues or characteristics thought to require the appearance, ranks and command structures associated with police. As Stone noted in 1929, 'in a dozen obvious ways the discipline of a police force is indicated by the mere appearance of the policeman on duty ... A disciplined patrolman possesses that "indefinable something" which makes him responsive to orders and authority. To determine what this indefinable something might be, takes us to the root of police organisation and into the various angles of police control' (Stone 1929: 63). Seventy years later, Deflem stated that 'Police bureaucracies are hierarchically-ordered with a clear chain of command ... and policework follows set rules and procedures ...' (Deflem 2000: 744; Deflem 2002: 18).

To achieve this result (and the accountability required to manage or restrain a police's coercive capacity or potential for corruption), negative and positive forms of discipline are required, though neither are unique to police and do not, therefore, represent policeness in isolation. Negative discipline uses punishment or the fear of penalties (often involving external agents) whereas positive discipline refers to an attitude or habit of obedience (Gourley 1950/1951). And positive discipline requires a degree of indoctrination — which may be professionalisation under another name — that is invariably expressed in terms of normative goals (e.g. Bayley 2006).[5]

The understanding associated with this approach is, like the OECD's perspective on police reform, predicated on the desirability of Western ideals. The dominance of the Westphalian state and the influence of Weberian analyses ensure that police are seen as state-based security actors even in areas of limited statehood, which are nevertheless judged against a template that attributes success to administrative efficiency, rule-oriented centralization and tax collection. It also ensures that discussions of the organisational and occupational culture of police follow patterns set by politically specific configurations of organisational structures, career lines, interactional patterns and values based on or rooted in the experience of police in rich industrialized democracies such as the UK and USA. This raises the question of which qualities or traits police in London or New York share with police in cities such as Hargeisa or Mogadishu, for commonalities should indicate the nature of policeness. What, then, can be said about Somalia's police?

## Somalia's regional police forces

Somalia (or, more accurately, the former Somalia) is commonly regarded as the paradigmatic collapsed state yet it is actually managed by a variety of security and administrative entities, each of which has its own police. The various entities are linked ethnically and economically but have different levels of stability and styles of security governance, which refers here to the rules, processes and interactions through which decisions are made and authority exercised. Further, although the international agenda for Somalia focuses on Mogadishu as the capital of a unified state, and on its Somali Police Force (SPF) as a national police, in practice IGOs and donors divide Somalia into three main administrative areas and three distinct forces: the Somaliland Police Force operates in the north-west, the Puntland Police Force works in the north-east and the SPF is confined to Mogadishu on the coast (South-Central is residual, rather than an entity, and its cross-hatching of clans obstructs the development of an entity, let alone a police). This division reflects the fact that Somaliland declared itself an independent republic in 1991, Puntland claimed autonomy in 1998, while the international community supports a government confined to Mogadishu, which remains dangerously insecure.

Somali police have little in common with the picture presented by the OECD, Stone or Deflem, and this must affect the ways in which their authority is established and perceived in everyday local

settings. Nevertheless, they are regarded by both the populace and international organisations as police. More importantly, all three share sufficient commonalities with police in other regions to offer a baseline for exploring the fundamentals of policeness, and the ways in which police authority is constituted, and recognised, in societies subject to chronic insecurity and high levels of illiteracy. Indeed, Somalia is a particularly valuable case in which to explore policeness because its forces cover a policing spectrum that spans Somaliland's relatively developed system and an SPF comprising militiamen in uniform who are expected to provide civilian policing in the middle of insurgency and humanitarian emergencies, with Puntland's emergent force positioned between the two. Further, Somalia emphasises the nuanced nature of policeness and its subjection to politics and local power relations. International advisers may regard Puntland's police as technically and institutionally five years behind Somaliland's, but institutional development has been possible in both because their forces were established after political settlements were agreed; regardless of their exploitative behaviour, Somaliland and Puntland police are regarded as legitimate forces, and are seen as essential elements in their governments' control apparatus. But this is not the case in Mogadishu where the SPF claims to have inherited the mantle of independent Somalia's national force, but is actually only one policing provider among many.

## SOMALI-STYLE POLICENESS

Given that many Somali officers lack the appearance and skills associated with Western-style policeness, two questions arise: How do Somali police rate on an understanding based on coercion, discipline, hierarchy and professionalism? Why is an elderly ex-militia man in a vest regarded as a policeman?[6] These questions take us beyond the issues absorbing Western police studies: What is policing? What do police do?

It is difficult to disentangle these issues because we do not know whether policeness results from policework or whether the activities of police officers represent policeness. On the one hand, we do not know what Somali police do (contrast Beek 2012; Göpfert 2013). International advisers who have worked in a locality for some months may know how officers spend their days, while local NGOs monitoring human rights may have examined the occurrence books kept by stations in major

towns such as Puntland's capital, Garowe. But internationals are outsiders and occurrence books do not record what officers' responses were, or why their judgment was or was not accepted (crimes recorded in Puntland's towns in 2010 included murder, rape, robbery, piracy, cheating, insults, property damage, affray and terrorism).[7] And many incidents go unrecorded, as when female officers from Hargeisa's women and children's unit deal informally with nine or ten of the 10-15 cases they receive each month (most involve minor crimes such as theft from market stalls).[8]

On the other hand, this situation does not mean that Somali officers are not police or that 'a police force in the Western sense is ... an alien institution' (Murphy 2011: 156. For Western policing see Manning 2011). Regardless of their appearance or ability to provide order, Somalia's forces exhibit a quality that is perceived by Somalis, and IGOs such as the UNDP and African Union (AU) as policeness. And this is understandable because they share occupational commonalities and a technical vocabulary with police in other regions, are linked into international policing networks,[9] are aware of the internationally respected policing Somalia experienced during the early years of independence (Perito 2002), and are in some cases (notably in Somaliland) consciously developing the complex of practices, procedures and norms required for the capacity building through which institution-building is thought to emerge and be expressed. Somalia police are structured on lines common throughout Africa and are familiar with conventional international practices and procedures, even as they filter them through local interests and dispositions. Like their peers around the world, they respond to imported practices in an adaptive manner, integrating aspects of international understanding with local realities and personal or group experience.

But context matters. In Somalia, social processes and cultural continuities (i.e. clannism) are more important than either international policing models or state-based authority, and notions of policeness accommodate this. The situation is further nuanced by four additional factors. First, while it is widely agreed that a monopoly on the legitimate use of coercion is a defining element of the police role (Bittner 1970), socially sanctioned coercion already plays a significant role in daily life in Somalia; the Somali preference for negotiation, informal arrangements and manoeuvre is underpinned by the threat of physical or political violence (Höehne and Luling 2010). At the same time, and this is a

second factor, memories of the effective but repressive policing enforced by former president Siad Barre are influential (Barre fled Somalia in 1991, but had been in power since 1969); senior officers and officials with experience of policing in the Barre era acknowledge the technical attractions of its institutional structures even as they emphasise that its brutality must be avoided.[10] The attractions of Barre-style effective security is even stronger in relation to Somalia's intelligence agencies, which are of higher status than its police; the CIA supports Puntland's Intelligence Agency, and many powerful clans have created agencies modelled on Barre's domestic intelligence agency, which was by far that era's strongest institution (RBC Radio 2013).

Third, anecdotal evidence suggests that politicians and influential officers and officials are attracted by the idea of developing a police because they regard it as an essential element of stateness and international recognition. However, stateness is seen as a desirable quality or organizing principle that can be traded for political purposes, rather than a process or precursor to state-building, which many associate with a predatory state (Renders 2012: 30. Contrast Brodeur 1992). Consequently, Somalis value the status and legitimacy associated with international police models, but in practice negotiate with private actors even as they develop the police's state-based authority. Linked to this is a fourth point, which is that Somali power brokers share an entrepreneurial understanding of the police's role, and the external assistance now given to police development by IGOs and donors makes police and policing a business opportunity. The result is that influential Somalis regard many of the structures and skills associated with Western policing as desirable even as they manipulate the values and procedures promoted in its name (########). The planned and unplanned consequences of such tactics have yet to be assessed.

## Layers of knowledge

This picture suggests that Somali police exhibit a functionally ambiguous but locally acceptable form of policeness while sharing sufficient technical commonalities with police elsewhere in the world to be recognisable as police by Somalis and international s alike. The best way to understand it is to see it as reflecting layers of knowledge comprising legacy issues, international influences, functional requirements, and local norms and practices, which cumulatively represent policeness. Admittedly,

layers is, like policeness, used in a descriptive, rather than a methodological or scientific manner. Foucault's argument that systems of thought and practice are governed by rules defining the conceptual possibilities determining the boundaries of thought in any given domain or period is suggestive (Foucault 2002), but it is difficult to identify the precise nature of Somali policeness, let alone analyse or map the 'discursive formations' influencing it.[11] Be that as it may, anecdotal evidence suggests that in areas of limited statehood and low literacy such as Somalia, perceptions of policeness are particularly affected by memories of the past. Indeed, conversations with senior officers and officials suggest that officers in all three forces build on memories of the 30 years of national policing that followed independence in 1960, even as they reject the practices of the Barre regime; rather than trying to shed its colonial-era identity, Somaliland officers and officials say the legacy is a useful reference point.[12] It could not be otherwise when the police commissioner (i.e. chief officer) in post in Somaliland in the autumn of 2011 had enlisted in 1942, while the commandant of Somaliland's police training academy at Mandera joined in 1958; the absence of pensions and welfare provision means that there is no incentive to retire.

Understood from this perspective, policeness concerns the knowledge and skills required to fulfil societal expectations regarding the management of low-level forms of disorder. It suggests that in fragile or fragmented states such as Somalia, policeness is selectively constituted in the light of legacy issues, contingencies and political goals, with security levels, political settlements, technical resources, international influence, personal experience and pragmatism acting as critical variables. Even so, perceptions of policeness are affected by local knowledge of international approaches to policing. While individual Somalis have different experiences of life during the wars of the 1990s, and the entities have differing visions of Somalia, there is a consensus on what police should look like that is reinforced by many officers in all three forces having a history of international contact. Thus the original SPF received equipment or training from, amongst others, Egypt, the German Democratic Republic, Italy, Sudan, West Germany, the UK and the USA. Additionally, Barre's advocacy of Marxism after 1969 embedded certain Soviet and Chinese approaches, and conversations with senior

officers and officials in Somaliland suggests that this influences the attitudes of some senior officials.[13]

Training projects supported or provided by IGOs such as the UNDP, the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) and the AU's mission to Somalia (AMISOM) add another layer to policing knowledge, and while training courses rarely shape the way officers conduct everyday police-business, they offer individuals a window onto international (i.e. modern or professional) approaches to policing, which then influence the ways in which officers articulate and express policeness. For example, the UNDP's civil policing project in Somaliland provides a package of activities that includes not only basic recruit training, but also specialist training in criminal investigation, critical incident management, and headquarters' functions such as financial management and logistics; at Mandera in September 2011, a class of 40 constables described the Cairo Declaration on Islam and Human Rights as widening their horizons. And many receive such training. Between October 2010 and 2011, 2,400 officers were trained at Mandera while other international activities included the visit to Mogadishu in 2009 of an AMISOM police team with a remit to train, mentor and advise the SPF, mid-level training courses by the Uganda Police Force, and cadet courses held in Uganda and Ethiopia. In November 2010, UNPOS, funded by Japan and in partnership with the AMISOM civilian police unit, began a three-month basic training course in Djibouti for 501 SPF officers based on a curriculum developed by the UNDP and approved by UNPOS, AMISOM and donors. More recently, in consultation with the Angola National Police, Italian Carabinieri instructors set up a public order training course for Somali officers at Djibouti's Police Academy (Hiraan Online 2013a), while a delegation from the SPF and AMISOM went to Sierra Leone for a study visit, Sierra Leone having been identified as a success story that Somalia could learn from (Hiraan Online 2013b). In other words, peer recognition plays a part, too.

## Tactical flexibility

Of the elements affecting policing identified here, local requirements, norms and practices are the most influential because officers are recruited from and act on behalf of specific elements of Somali society, with clan-based calculations influencing every aspect of governance and social relations.

Also, they must integrate traditional Somali approaches into their functional knowledge and technical skills, for, unlike the situation in, say, Liberia, the social fabric did not collapse after the country fragmented in 1991, and Somalis seeking justice look first to customary law and local or traditional non-state actors such as elders or Shari'a, rather than to police. Officers (and general-duties officers in particular) typically intervene only when requested by elders implementing customary law.[14] More generally, they engage with local elders, mayors and district security committees about issues such as land or water rights only when invited — and mayors and the members of district security councils in towns such as Puntland's Bossaso, Galkayo, Gardo and Garowe say that land and water rights are the biggest issue they hear about on daily basis.[15] Arguably, legal pluralism is the major challenge to Western conceptions of what it means to be police.

In practice, negotiation and tactical flexibility are key themes in Somali policing, just as they are in Somali society, and this must affect perceptions of policeness. This is particularly true of SPF officers who may be aware of international policing practices but must navigate between the contradictory demands of donors' insistence on civilian policing and the government's need for counter-insurgency operations. They must also consult with a range of alternative policing providers, for Mogadishu's policing is provided by militia and clan groups loyal to factional leaders, as well as by business men and Shari'a courts. Indeed, combinations of formal and informal providers are common. In July 2011, for example, security in the city's Dharkenlay district improved significantly as a result of the combined efforts of an experienced cross-clan militia made up of officers who had served under Barre (the Hillac brigade), youth militias (madani), a Sufi militia (Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jama, which is theoretically aligned to the federal government but actually operates autonomously) and the district's police (PAC 2011b). This raises questions about what distinguishes a policeman from a militiaman when neither wears a uniform and both fight.

A further complication arises from the fact that policeness (as in the technical skills associated with specialist coercive knowledge) is valued as a means to a practical end. Policing is a commodity, a business opportunity and an expression of power relations; it is part of the same political dynamics as clannism, conflict, entrepreneurialism and fragmentation, not least because Somalia is the site of

multiple conflicts over territory, trade monopolies and political power fought by people without an interest in institutions or security forces they cannot control (#########). The implications of this for policing and policeness are as yet unclear, but it results in, for example, opaque decision-making surrounding senior appointments, as the case of Puntland's technically competent and politically skilful police commissioner Ali Nor Omar, shows. In 2011, after three years in post, Nor resigned unexpectedly and was replaced by one of his former deputies (he became prisons commissioner). Officials from the UN think he was removed partly because his age made him less effective but primarily because he is an outsider from the small but aggressive Dishiishi sub-clan which has a difficult relationship with other Majateen sub-clans.[16] The replacement of the SPF commissioner three times between 2008 and 2011 is part of a similar pattern. Indeed, it is particularly striking because each new appointment resulted in international funders putting their payment of SPF stipends on hold until the officer concerned was able to demonstrate his control of the SPF.

## Sharply defined ideals are misleading

In the absence of systematic fieldwork it is difficult to offer clear-cut conclusions about Somali-style policeness, but tentative preliminary observations include the following four points (compare O'Neill, Marks and Singh 2009: 3-7). First, a significant proportion of officers are middle-aged or elderly or have close links to militia and may not see themselves primarily as police, though this does not stop them being regarded by the local populace as police. Many of the officers attending Somalia's training academies are unable to understand basic policing principles and practices, yet even illiterate officers want to become more skilful craftsmen: when asked what would improve policing standards and personal skills, the unanimous answer from Mandera's classes in September 2011 was a month's extension of investigative training. This may, of course, reflect students' desire for another month at the academy, rather than their conviction that investigative skills lie at the core of being police, yet the centrality of investigative training vis-à-vis policework was consistently emphasised in interviews and informal conversations across Somaliland and Puntland. Only officers from Mogadishu prioritised counter-insurgency and weapons training.[17]

Second, policing is a dangerous job incurring the risk of assassination, which must isolate officers. Witness the experience of Hussein Jiinow Afrah, an SPF policeman who has been wounded by three improvised explosive devices since he became a policeman six years ago: 'The shrapnel still lodged in my shoulder, groin and arm causes me no end of problems. But I feel lucky because many of my friends are dead. Al-Shabaab calls me from time to time to try and intimidate me and tell me to quit the force' (SomaliaReport 2012b). It is difficult to tell whether the resultant isolation is tempered by clan relationships, or whether it encourages a sense of solidarity — or policeness — that is reinforced by having to deal with the consequences of physical danger, inadequate equipment and irregular pay. Whatever the case, clan-based commitments and obligations are the only guarantees most Somalis can rely on; security, protection and opportunities — all depend on clan and/or personal relationships, rather than on governmental directives or institutions (Luling 2006; Gundel 2009), and policeness must be affected by this.

Third, officers must accommodate high levels of public distrust. Over half of the residents from the north-central town of Galkayo who responded to a survey conducted by the Hargeisa-based Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP) reported low trust in officers whom they found to be inaccessible in terms of location, and slow to respond.[18] Even so, the implications of this may be minimal given that inter-personal trust is low throughout Somalia, and similar complaints are made about police in every region of Africa (#########).

Fourth, arguably, the most significant divergence between Somali practice and international understanding arises from officers operating in a rule-based society characterized by legal pluralism: both Somali and international-style policing displays a degree of flexibility, discretion and pragmatism, but only international policing offsets this with a hierarchical and bureaucratic organisation. Indeed, sharply defined Western-style policing models may be misleading, and it could be that Somali policeness and policing structures are, like Somali social structures, best understood as projects of changing social and political processes within unequal fields of power (albeit conventionally organized), with the emphasis on accommodation and flexibility (Little 2003: 3).

Legacy issues, international support and local norms and practices have in this way provided Somali officers with a layered knowledge base and nuanced understanding of what it means to be police. However, the emergence, acknowledgement and development of policeness ultimately depend on political settlements, which require relative security and stability. That Somaliland's police is the most technically developed of Somali forces is not accidental; as the director general of the ministry of the interior noted in 2011, security and stability are Somaliland's most noteworthy achievement.[19] Contrast the situation in Mogadishu where security is minimal, many SPF officers are militiamen, and the credibility of the government on whose behalf they claim to act is limited. Hence the significance of the SPF's chosen name and claimed lineage — and its utility as a tool for addressing the key contextual issue affecting the institutional and practical expression of policeness in fragile environments: security levels.

## SECURITY AS THE CRITICAL VARIABLE

Mogadishu is a dangerous city to police. Al-Shabaab remains active (AfricanArguments 2014) while suicide bombings, assassinations, mines, IEDs, stray bullets and hit-and-run attacks erode traditional practices and values. Insecurity is exacerbated by clan and community tensions, freelance militias, disputes about property and livestock, the presence of approximately 369,000 internally displaced persons (IRIN 2013a), and high rates of theft, forced detention, sexual violence and gun-related murders, which many see as components of broader conflict dynamics, rather than as individual events (OCVP 'Mogadishu' 2011: 21). Somalia receives weapons from Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti, Ukraine, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea and the USA, and it is thought that more high-powered weapons are in circulation now than during the 2000s. Insecurity, combined with memories of Barre's regime, meddling by frontline states such as Ethiopia, and the weakness of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), destroys respect for state institutions such as police. Somali politicians and power brokers think in terms of individual or clan interests, government authorities are unresponsive to people's needs, and social factors play out in the political sphere (OCVP 'Mogadishu' 2011: 36). This

makes for high levels of suspicion (SomaliaReport 2012a), which undermine capacity-building projects; physical safety and survival are more pressing concerns than developing institutions or rights-based policing. As focus groups conducted by the Hargeisa-based OCVP note, there is a 'lack of faith in the ability of the community (let alone the state) to protect individuals, a sense of injustice, trauma, and general hopelessness for the future' (OCVP Mogadishu 2011). Meanwhile, youth focus groups identified 'fear of the unknown' as a prompt for joining armed groups (ibid). Even Médecins Sans Frontières pulled out of Somalia in August 2013 because the threat of violence had become intolerable: 'We have reached our limit' (Al Jazeera 2013).

The situation in Mogadishu is more extreme than in Hargeisa or Garowe, yet in practice Somalis in all three cities have a range of resources for coping with the consequences of insecurity, with the most successful blending local ties, contextual knowledge and informal responses (Renders 2012), and police play a part in this. However, their role is affected by factors such as Somalis prioritising reconciliation and reparation over retribution and punishment, and preferring informal alternatives to formal sentencing and detention facilities (SomaliaReport 2012c). Customary law is more powerful than formal institutions and elders are used to solve, manage and negotiate issues; government (secular) law and its associated institutions is the weakest of all. Co-operative arrangements exist too, with militias loyal to Mogadishu's district commissioners ensuring that people returning to their neighbourhoods register at a police station. Meanwhile police accommodate civil society initiatives providing surveillance and reporting: 'they tell us'. In other words, while Somali-style policeness shares certain characteristics with policeness in other countries, it cannot be discussed in isolation from the activities of informal policing providers.

## Policeness re-emerges

One of the notable features of Somalia's complex and dynamic environment is that the consequences of political fragmentation for policeness and its nominally state-based authority are more limited than international policing models suggest. In Mogadishu, for instance, many SPF officers are little more than militiamen in police uniforms, yet this does not mean that they are not police any more than being former rebels precludes Eritreans or South Sudanese from being police.[20] If anything, militia

affiliation is understandable, given that the SPF's lightly-armed officers confront insurgents armed with heavy machine guns and light anti-aircraft artillery. Significantly, while most Somalis want clear distinctions between police and military enforcement agencies, they are less concerned by those between police and militia (PAC 2011b; OCVP 2011).[21] The result is that local realities are accommodated within internationally recognised police structures.

Although the SPF's technical capacity has declined, and its formal procedures and discipline are minimal, it is organized on the basis of directorates of operations, finance, training, CID, and administration, and it performs policing activities that range from counter-insurgency to traffic management and basic forms of criminal investigation; Dharkeynley may be managed by militia but even in April 2011 there were 30 uniformed officers present on the streets and in local markets (PAC April 2011a). The picture this presents, of the re-emergence of a recognised and recognisable police, reinforces the argument presented here: despite several decades of conflict and the absence of documentation,[22] memories of the SPF as a centralized and conventionally organized command in the 30-years between independence (1960) and the outbreak of civil war (1991) ensure that a baseline for perceptions of policeness exists. If anything, the speed with which the SPF has developed over the last five years suggests that it builds on shared ideas of what is required for a locally-appropriate form of policeness. Hence, in mid-2011, after two decades of conflict, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and its police took control of approximately 98 per cent of Mogadishu, which was then divided into 16 districts, which were sub-divided into a headquarters and four divisions, each of which had a a station. In addition to stations at the airport (70 officers), port (94) and the criminal investigation department (CID, 150), there were stations in Dharkenley (65 officers), Hamar Weyne (91), Hamar Jabab (250), Shangani (40), Waberi (72) and Wadajir (92) (PAC 2011b). By then, the international community had ensured that most of the city's 5,000-7,000 officers (precise numbers were not known) were dressed in light blue shirts and dark blue trousers or in military-style light brown (colour is based mainly on where the officers are trained) even if their pay was delayed and they lacked weaponry, handcuffs, batons and the pick-up trucks needed for mobility (PAC 2011a).

Somali understanding of the policeness this reflects can be deduced from reports produced by Mogadishu's police oversight committee, the Police Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC's reports provide a record of what a small group of educated (and, in some cases, politically ambitious) Somalis considered likely to resonate with the UN, for which they were written. Take, for example, its *Monthly Report on the Activities of the Somali Police Force* for July 2011. Like all PAC reports, it emphasises the SPF's role in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency, rather than civilian policing, and routinely refers to officers as 'policemen-soldiers'. It divides activities into operations intended 'to enhance community safety' and 'street patrolling as part of wider counter terrorism efforts', noting that most relate to deterrence. In other words, its vision of policing presents international ideals filtered through local realities — but the need for a public police is unquestioned.

The SPF's workload, which was organized around divisions and stations, and based on information from street patrols, informants and government directives or orders, required officers to man checkpoints, deploy at major intersections, and conduct random stop and search operations in an effort to increase the police's presence. Thus officers in Wadajir manned a checkpoint on the district's main road and patrolled the nearby market and main bus stations armed with AK47s, talking to local people in a 'friendly' manner' (PAC 2011a).They targeted individuals or small groups suspected of armed robbery, kidnapping and looting (in March 2011 the latter involved militiamen responsible for providing night-time neighbourhood watches). Non-terrorist prosecutions were rare but counter-insurgency operations were common, with police in Hamar Weyne described as targeting 'sleeping insurgents'. No mass arrests were carried out in July though March had seen a major security operation involving 300 people charged with having unlawful weapons and violating security rules. The July report also notes that Dharkenlay police had had a particularly difficult week, fighting youth militias armed with hand grenades and handguns who were suspected of being both armed robbers and covert insurgents, and arresting seven men (three of whom were military) who had set up illegal check points to extort money. The robust policeness this expresses is not dissimilar to that found in urban areas in, say, Kenya and Nigeria.

## CONCLUSIONS

Somali experience suggests that being police is a more ambiguous and dynamic phenomenon than the Western canon allows, reflecting a blend of political and functional imperatives, past practices, current contingencies, personal experience, societal expectations and international imperatives. It has as much to do with the symbolic and coercive functions associated with the idea of a police as with specific forms of state-based organisation, capacity or activity, important though these are. It alludes to the occupational commonalities that allow a Sri Lankan police adviser contracted to the UNDP to work with officers from Somaliland. But it cannot be defined neatly; Somali officers may align many of their practices with international policing models, but they operate in a rule-based society characterized by chronic insecurity, legal pluralism and limited statehood, and policeness must accommodate this. Context is critical, and norms and practices based on Western experience do not necessarily travel well outside the societies in which they were originally developed. Consequently, Somali policeness questions aspects of Western orthodoxy (e.g. the need for formal accountability procedures) while affirming others, such as the role of discretion and pragmatism.

Somali experience is extreme, yet its very extremity offers insight into the essence of what police are, and what makes police recognised as such. It demonstrates that policeness concerns the use by specific actors of the technical knowledge required to manage regime or societal expectations regarding the management of low-level forms of disorder. Whether it is a cause, an effect or simply a label is arguable, but in Somalia at least, policeness is usefully understood as reflecting a project of changing social and political processes within unequal fields of power, with the emphasis on accommodation and tactical flexibility.

Ultimately, policeness is a matter of perception. Internationals understand it as a quality possessed by sworn or trained officers belonging to a specific type of organisation whereas Somalis regard it as alluding to the coercive potential of members of a broader-based group. Nevertheless, in both cases, policeness is, to paraphrase Simmel's observation on trust, 'a hypothesis regarding future behaviour that is certain enough to serve as a basis for practical conduct' (Sasaki and Marsh 2011: 1).

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[1] Personal observations, Hargeisa, September 2011. Contrast Hargeisa's handful of female officers, who wear smart hijabs donated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as part of its gender project.

[2] It was not possible to visit Mogadishu, but interviews were held in Nairobi with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG)'s police commissioner and director general of the Ministry of the Interior, as well as with past and current members of Mogadishu's Police

Advisory Committee (PAC), either in person or by telephone.

[3] There are no studies systematically addressing police culture or function in the 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, let alone in the South more generally. The researchers conducting relevant fieldwork are primarily French, German and Swiss students employing ethnographic methods as part of an anthropology of the state (Lenz, Beek and Göpfert 2013). However, much of this work focuses on West Africa where police are part of established bureaucracies. Compare Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014.

[4] Significantly, Huntington's use of professionalism as a tool to conceptualise the attributes of the military was developed in response to the US military's involvement in politics.

[5] Discipline is also thought to involve leadership and command structures. Thus the current Ghanaian Inspector General of Police (IGP) called on officers in command positions to provide the supervisory leadership needed to' restore total discipline' to the Ghanaian service. He argued that 'recalcitrant and inexperienced' officers guilty of 'unacceptable, unprofessional acts' had not received relevant instructions or guidance from their supervisors (*Chronicle* 2013).

[6] Similar questions might be asked of al-Shabaab's secret policemen, the Amniyat (Hansen 2013: 83-85).

[7] Personal observations at police stations in Gardo and Garowe, and at Garowe's Legal Aid Centre, PLAC, 9-10 September 2011.

[8] Interview, five women officers, Hargeisa, 6 September 2011.

[9] Somalia has been a member of INTERPOL since 1975, and was connected to INTERPOL's I-24/7 global police communications system in 2007.

[10] Personal communications, Hargeisa, September 2011.

[11] A rich literature on Somali genealogy, culture and institutions has developed since the publication of I. M. Lewis' seminal research in 1961 (for an overview see Höehne and Luling 2010), but none of it addresses the police's role. The analytical and empirical implications of this literature for wider debates about police culture, institution building and the rule of law have yet to be assessed.

[12] Personal conversations, Hargeisa, 7 September 2011. Puntland's penal code is based on Anglo-Indian models.

[13] Comments based on personal discussions in Hargeisa, reinforced by conversations with international advisers in London, Nairobi, New York and Somalia, August-September 2011.

[14] Officers in Hargeisa handle an average of 2.4 reported crimes a year while those in Sahil Region (several hours drive to the north of Hargeisa) deal with 5.6 (Somaliland Police 2011: 3). Cases of rape are usually referred to elders whereas robbery — which is seen as more important — is referred to police. Compare Somalia Report 2012b.

[15] Personal communications, Gardo and Garowe, September 2011.

[16] There are dozens of Somali news websites providing almost real-time updates, but there are no known open-source analyses of the power relations shaping the security environment.

[17] Interviews, senior SPF officers, Nairobi, September 2011.

[18] Against this, half of the respondents to assessments conducted in Somaliland's Burao and Las Anod declared ‘relatively high’ to ‘very high’ trust in the police (OCVP 2011; personal communications, Burao, 20 September 2011). Compare Sasaki and Marsh 2011.

[19] Interview, director general, Hargeisa, 7 September 2011.

[20] In 1996, Eritrean officers dismissed the utility of rank on the basis that there had been none during the revolution, though they admitted that war records influenced informal rankings and status (Interview, Eritrean officer, Bramshill, 19 April 1996). Ten years later, many of South Sudan's new police were ex-rebels. Some had a policing background but most did not, and those who did identified themselves as former rebels, rather than policemen (Interview, senior South Sudan officer, Pretoria, April 2007). Further, many thought they were paid in recognition of their wartime record, rather than for their role as police (Personal communication, Ugandan police commissioner, Berlin, November 2012).

[21] A comparable trend is observable in Mogadishu's military forces. Thus 'Somalia’s armed forces comprise some 20,000 soldiers, defined as those fighting Al-Shabab, including militias not formally integrated into the military. But only around 13,000 soldiers receive regular financial payments, most

of which are paid by the international community' (IRIN 2013). Stipends are a tool for buying the loyalty of both soldiers and police.

[22] There is little documentary information available between articles and reports written by advisers in the 1990s (Ganzglass 1996; Thomas and Spataro 1998; Perito 2002) and the records created since 2008 by the UNDP's civilian policing project. Record keeping remains problematic even for the purpose of paying the SPF, but the PAC's reports help to fill the gap, and can be checked against the observations of international police advisers and Somali on-line news reports.